

# Mariposa Weekly Gazette

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## Fourth grade students identify plants



THE STUDENTS WHO HELPED IDENTIFY THE PLANTS ARE PICTURED ABOVE. THEY ARE TANNER STRONG AND DERRICK MCINNIS AND NATALIE ROSANDER (STANDING).

Two fourth-grade classes from Woodland Elementary School became the first students to visit the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District's (MCRCD) Sierra Foothills Native Plant Demonstration Garden at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds on June 4. The purpose of their visit was to discover some of the values of native plants and pollinators through experiential learning.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is funding the grant for the garden project, located just outside the SNC office on Fairgrounds Road. The SNC grant, in fact, made this trip possible by financing the bus transportation of the students, teachers and some parents.

One of the requirements of the garden grant is to develop California state standards based curriculum for one of the grades. The demonstration garden embodies many educational components, two of them focusing on native plants' importance in providing nectar and pollen for pollinators and the support system they provide to wildlife, such as food, nesting sites and materials, and other habitat values. These themes were a perfect fit for the fourth-grade life science standards, which include the study of food chains, food webs and the interdependencies of flora and fauna.

Educator Janette Gamble volunteered many hours developing the life-science curriculum along with MCRCD project manager Kris Randal. They presented a food chain/food web activity and lesson plan for both Nancy Gunderson's and Donna Wight's, fourth grade teachers, classes at Woodland School the week before the field trip. This presentation familiarized the students with some of the native plants at the garden site and with many local wildlife species.

To fulfill the fourth-grade life-science requirements meant that a second alternate activity was needed to accommodate the two classes. Retired Mariposa County Farm Advisor Karen Robb volunteered to develop and present a lesson plan on pollinators, and other volunteers were recruited and trained as docents to guide small groups of students throughout the garden on a plant identification scavenger hunt. The docents included Susan Clark, Dee-Dee Combes, Pat Garcia, Gamble, Marion Lafler and Ann Mendershausen. Mandy Loftis and Len McKenzie volunteered to help with logistics and assist the docents.

As a partner in this project, fairgrounds manager Brian Bullis delivered three picnic tables to the separate activity sites, allowing the students to study flower parts or make plant identification cards in the cool shade of oaks.

At the pollinator site, Robb flower structures and the diverse array of pollinators that many of these flowers attract. Pollination and the interdependence of plants and animals are among the required lessons in the standards, and students examined some dissected flowers from the garden to study.

At the garden site, students learned how to identify specific plants by participating in a scavenger hunt. With the guidance of their docents, small groups of students searched for “their” plant by reading clue cards. Docents encouraged a hands-on approach to investigating the plants’ aromatic qualities, texture, leaf placement and shape, and other characteristics.

A second scavenger hunt began as the students searched a table displaying a variety of On the back of each photo was an information card detailing many of the plant’s attributes, such as its adaptability or survival mechanisms; usage by California Indians; wildlife values; garden uses; etc. The students then took the information card back to the picnic tables and created an identification card for that plant, using information they considered important on their cards.

Since the native plant garden is still a work in progress and the plants are not yet labeled, the students were also providing a community service by creating plant identifiers. These temporary signs will be laminated and attached to the plants for interim use until permanent signs are installed.

Just before the students left to go to the fairgrounds picnic area to eat their lunches, several students who had finished their plant ID cards asked, “Can’t we identify more plants first?”